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## Community Libraries in Indonesia: A Survey of Government-Supported and Independent Reading Gardens

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## **Community Libraries in Indonesia: A Survey of Government-Supported and Independent Reading Gardens**

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### **Introduction**

Indonesia is a country with over 240 million inhabitants and 16,000 islands, 8,000 of which are inhabited. After having been colonized by the Dutch for over four hundred years, the last fifty years has seen the country develop at a rapid pace. To promote equitable development and democracy in such a large and variegated country, spreading literacy and access to information is crucial. Uniquely, this is achieved through a combination of public libraries, private renting libraries, and a variety of free informal lending libraries or community libraries, also called reading gardens (Taman Bacaan).

There has been little written about the Indonesian reading gardens. Kamil (2003) and Priyanto (2006) have introduced the phenomenon, and Septiana (2007) has provided a detailed case study of a few community libraries, but none of these have made any attempt at surveying the amount of community libraries in different categories, or give an overview of the government's policy. Thus, this paper attempts to provide an "overview of the field" of community libraries in Indonesia, including rental libraries, independent community libraries, and government support and strategy. This is an initial exploratory study with many weaknesses, but it is believed that the data collected will still provide a valuable snapshot of the current community library movement in Indonesia.

### **Historical Background**

The first library in Indonesia was the Batavian Kerkeraad, which was established in 1624, and only available to clergy. The Dutch colonial government gradually opened more libraries, including the Batava Association for Arts and Science library in 1778, which became a depository library for the Netherlands Indies, and would later go on to become the National Library of Indonesia (McGlynn 1998, p. 86). In 1864, the Free Masons began operating libraries to provide reading materials to less well-off Europeans, and the Catholic church also founded public reading rooms, so that by the beginning of the 20th century almost every larger city maintained an *openbare leszaal* (public library). However, these libraries were usually only available to Europeans, contained almost exclusively publications in European languages, and did not contribute much towards the literacy and information needs of the large indigenous population (*ibid.*).

However, going back as far as the official library history, Indonesia has a parallel history of informal libraries, book rental stores and other alternative distribution systems for books. In Jakarta, there is evidence of private renting libraries for hand-copied manuscripts operating between around 1790 to 1900, and with the advent of printing these were replaced with book rental libraries, often operated by Chinese immigrants to Jawa (Iskandar, 1981; Drewes, 1981). This is also the earliest recorded usage of

the term “Taman Bacaan” or reading garden, which must have seemed much more inviting than “library” that would have been perceived as a colonial institution (Salmon, 1985). Renting libraries of various forms have persisted until our days, but in addition there were experiments with free reading gardens in the 1970's and 1980's, which ultimately formed the precursor to today's large wave of reading gardens (Menguji Idealisme, 2002; Septiana, 2007, p. 4-5). In addition, during all these upheavals, the original idea of fee-charging renting libraries, which have played such a crucial role through the history of the nation, and hark back a hundred years or more, is still in operation.

During this period, the government has also participated actively. During the beginning of the 19th Century, the “Ethical Policy” led the Dutch colonial government to begin introducing primary education for non-Europeans (Tjoen, 1966). At this time, they also developed the Balai Pustaka as a publisher of literature in Indonesian languages, and set up several thousand “people's libraries”; 3x3 meter cupboards which would be located in classrooms, hospitals or barracks to distribute Balai Pustaka approved literature (*ibid.* ; Drewes, 1961, Freidus, 1977). After independence, the Indonesian government began another large-scale project to create “people's libraries” in 16,000 villages using volunteer librarians (Hadi, 1956). This project soon faltered due to a shortage of fund, and political instability, but something similar would be tried again later (Anuar, 1983).

Beginning in 1992, the government wanted to provide reading material for new literates to help them keep and improve their literacy, and avoid relapse. To achieve this, it began creating village “community reading gardens” (Direktori TBM Tahun 2007, 2007). Numbers are unclear, but they might have created as many as 7,000 of these centers, which mainly offered access to government propaganda, and were never properly embraced by the communities (Suryadi, cited in Bella, 2007; 5.500 TBM Terbilang, 2006). Once again, the project did not last long until support ended due to the Asian financial crisis, and political instability (Menguji Idealisme, 2002).

The year 1998, when the Suharto regime fell and Indonesia became a democracy, was a watershed in Indonesian history. This opened up for a rapid growth in NGOs and voluntary associations, and after 2001, led to a new wave of free independent lending libraries, which re-use the old term “reading garden”. After a few years, the government decided to begin contributing financially to this development, and the Ministry of Education released their strategy on how to support independent reading gardens.

## **Methodology**

I lived in Indonesia from 2006-2007, and participated in one Book Day event at the Ministry of Education where many community libraries participated. I also made a field visit to one community library, as well as several public libraries in Jakarta and Jogjakarta. Because there is so little research published in this field, and documents are frequently not online, or difficult to access, a number of research methods had to be employed to gather data. Since there is no exhaustive list of reading gardens, I have used two sources: the government statistics covering only the reading gardens that have received government support, and a list of 1001 Buku members. 1001 Buku is an NGO that collects and distributes books to independent reading gardens, and it will be apparent later that their members are statistically very different from the community reading gardens that receive subvention from the government.

## **Communication with informants**

I have communicated with a large number of people who are active in community libraries, library networks, research, and the government. My initial contacts put me in touch with some that were helpful, and I also found others through their academic writings or their blogs. Almost without fail they have been incredibly helpful, trying to answer my questions, and crucially supplying me with documentation and information that could not be readily found on the Internet. I have shared my theories with them, and as my understanding has developed, my questions have changed and become more specific. This is similar

to the approach that O'Brien (2006) used in his fieldwork in China, where he would test his developing arguments directly on his interviewees.

## **Newspaper and other articles**

Because of the paucity of sources, I have used newspaper articles frequently. Even this has not been uncomplicated: some newspapers do not publish their articles online without passwords (which can only be gotten through the use of an Indonesian cell phone account), others take articles down or restructure their websites so that even internal links are broken. I am indebted to the many mailing lists and blogs that republish articles regarding libraries and reading gardens, some of them even creating extensive clipping archives (a great example is "Kliping Mengenai reading garden" at <http://mediarent.blogspot.com/>). I would rather have taken the articles directly from newspaper websites, and have attempted to locate them, in some cases even using archive.org's WayBack Machine (<http://www.archive.org/web/web.php>) and Google's cache function (<http://www.google.com>), however at every single instance where I have found the original source, it has been identical to the one reposted on blogs and mailing lists, and I believe that the articles reproduced on blogs and mailing lists are mostly very faithful to the original.

## **Survey**

It is important to gather more data on reading gardens in Indonesia, since many questions about topics such as the efficacy of government programs, factors that are conducive or not to the establishment and success of a reading garden, and others can only be answered in this way. Conducting a large-scale survey was not feasible in the time frame of this research, but as an initial attempt at collecting some useful data, a survey was conducted among reading gardens that are in the 1001 Buku network. I obtained from 1001 Buku a database of libraries in their network located in the greater Jakarta area, and a research assistant in Jakarta assisted with calling the contact persons. Out of a total of 98 reading gardens contacted, 11 were unreachable, and four did not want to answer the questions, leaving a response rate of 84%. In most cases, initial contact was established through the phone, and answers to our questions were later returned through e-mail.

## **Renting Libraries Today**

I will begin by discussing the renting libraries that still exist, then talk about the various autonomous reading gardens, and finish by discussing the government support and government statistics. From the historical overview, I have shown how the name "reading garden" was first applied to for-profit stores that rented out books, and how this has developed into free lending libraries. However, renting libraries still exist, although probably a lot fewer in number than in their heydays. There are very few written sources mentioning them, but the newspaper *Republika* provides instructive profiles of two renting libraries in Jakarta, "Elman's reading garden" and "Aneka D", which give a taste of how these renting libraries operate.

Elman serves the market Pasar Minggu in Jakarta with his yellow VW Combi Wagon six days a week, from 1PM to 8PM. He has a collection of 2,500 books, but only 1,000 can fit in the car at one time. His car is owned by three entrepreneurs, who have already been running two kiosks and three library cars in Medan for four years. In Jakarta, the entrepreneurs just started a year ago, and borrowers who pay 20,000 rupiah as deposit, and 5,000 rupiah for administration receive member cards. Readers can then borrow up to five books for two days (comics) or three days (novels) (Diyakini Akan Berkembang, 2004).

Aneka D is the name of Koesnander's reading garden, which he inherited from his father who founded it in Bandung in 1963. He now has two locations in South Jakarta, which serve groups ranging from elementary school students to housewives and office workers. Over 2,000 members have paid

2,500 rupiah for a member's card with photo, and can choose between the 30,000 books available, spanning comics, novels especially martial arts novels, - and non-fiction. The profit from the two stores is around 16 million rupiah per month, which mostly goes to pay for the location rent (10 million rupiah) and salaries for his three employees, and leaves him with about 10% profit. However, he buys new books almost every week, and sometimes even takes over the collections of reading gardens that have gone bankrupt. He believes that renting libraries will continue to develop, since old books that are not available in bookstores become even more interesting to lenders, whereas if you are in the PlayStation business, you have to buy news games and machines every year. Both of the two owners charge around 10% of the cover price in rent (ibid.).

Furthermore, Sianturi (2005), in an article about the copyright issues surrounding renting libraries, described the abundance of renting libraries in Bandung. He conjures an image of renting libraries on almost every street corner, especially popular with school children, which lend out novels and comics. He also notes that the normal renting price is 5% of cover price to read it within the reading garden, and 10% of the price to borrow it.

An interesting offshoot of the traditional renting library is the book café. An article in Panyingkul! (2006) lists seven different book cafés in Makassar, which all provide both books and extra services, like food and drinks. Kafebuku has the tagline "A new, cozy place to read and eat", while Buku Baca Lontar with the tagline "Books, Library and Handycraft" sells cheap books, rents them out, and provides batik workshops. And Kafe Baca Biblioholic has a library of over 6000 books. There are also book cafés in Jakarta, and other locations (see for example Mardena, 2004).

### Free Reading Gardens

Moving on to the free reading gardens, we might separate them into three groups. The first consists of the ones set up by government. This group is not mentioned much in the literature, and seems to consist of a combination of community reading gardens that were started in the 1990's and "survived" the decentralization movement, as well as current community reading gardens set up by local and regional government. From my documents, it appears that the national government does not have any program for setting up community reading gardens itself, but rather works through block grants. However, when comparing the statistical profile of the community reading gardens that received funding from the government, with the reading gardens in 1001 Buku's network, they appear very different, and a possible explanation could be that most of the government funding goes to community reading gardens that are run by local or regional governments, or organizations closely connected to the government.

Another group, frequently mentioned in the media, is the reading gardens set up by donors: Indonesian and foreign companies, and Indonesian state enterprises. These often set up a large amount of reading gardens at the same time. Here I will provide some examples from this varied group: The Dutch Government has funded 11 reading gardens in elementary schools in Yogyakarta, after the earthquake (Wahyuni, 2008). McDonald's has even started a McDonald reading corner in several McDonald's restaurants, which anyone can use for educational activities, like story telling and drawing. They work with *Forum Indonesia Membaca* (Forum Indonesia Reads) and they actively collect books from their customers for reading gardens (Shaleh, 2006).

The Women's section, DPD Justice and Welfare Party, PKS Pekalongan [Bidang Kewanitan DPD Partai Keadilan Sejahtera PKS Pekalongan] has opened a reading garden in their women's justice station [pos wanita keadilan], and the ex-artist Rima Melati has opened a reading garden in Dusun Tembi, supported by Yayasan Adinda and the bank HSBC (Anhar, 2006). On the island Riau, Riau Pulp (a large wood processing company) has set up community libraries with book packages consisting of five copies each of 200 titles in 110 villages. They believed that the 200 titles would last for a year, but already after three months, they were told that the children had completed all the books, and they are now collecting books to add to the libraries (Kelana, 2007).

The involvement of state owned enterprises [BUMN - Badan Usaha Milik Negara] (SOEs) is puzzling, since one would think that this would be the task of the Ministry of Education. But in September 2003, the wife of the Minister for State Owned Enterprises [pos wanita keadilan] (SOEs) Laksamana invited the heads of the biggest SOEs to a hotel, where she asked them to contribute to her plan to build 400 community reading gardens in Indonesia. Within two hours, the organization Yayasan TB Indonesia, had collected 22 Billion rupiah from the telephone company, the social security insurance company, and other big SOEs (Dua Jam Himpun 22 M, 2003). This organization, organized by the *Association for wives and female workers in SOEs* [Ikatan Istri Karyawan BUMN], was set up by Laksamana, and when her husband lost the minister post, it also closed.

The final category, and the one that interests us the most in this research, is the independent reading gardens that are started by small NGOs or citizen groups. These might receive some support from 1001 Buku, government block-grants, or other sources, but they have a strong identity and are grounded in a community - not just "one of 40 reading gardens set up by a company". Incidentally, when asked about the government policy of giving only one block-grant to any community reading garden, and whether this created problems with sustainability among community reading gardens, head of the sub-section for Reading Culture Ridwan Arshad answered "for the community reading garden that exist only to receive support, yes [it can create problems], but for the community reading gardens that exist because of the commitment of the community, no" [Bagi community reading garden yang hadir karena adanya bantuan ya tetapi bagi community reading garden yang hadir karena kepedulian masyarakat tidak.] (personal communication, 2008).

As for the numbers, Ace Suryadi, Director General of Non-Formal and Informal Education, has stated that there are now 5,400 reading gardens in Indonesia (Ace Suryadi, cited in Bella, 2007), however it is highly unclear how this number was derived, since the Direktori TBM Tahun 2007 (2007) produced by his department states that they have very little data. In either case, a simple number is not very informative, since many of these might be constituted of two bookshelves in a school that are usually kept locked, or even community reading gardens that only exist on paper for block grants. On the other hand, there are probably a good number of reading gardens that have not been recorded by any formal statistics. An added problem is the volatility of the numbers – since most reading gardens are run by inexperienced volunteers with no stable funding (even the government funding is a one-time affair) many do not last very long. In Tarlen Handayani's Peta Komunitas Literer Bandung from 2005 there were 40 literary communities (reading gardens, alternative bookstores, etc) listed in Bandung, but a few years later, only 8 were left (Handayani, 2007). Despite these individual setbacks, most of my informants have confirmed a feeling that the number of reading garden is continuously growing.

## Reading Garden Activities

So how do the independent reading gardens operate? A common theme for most of the reading gardens discussed here, and most others I have encountered in my research, is their strong focus on becoming more than a *gudang buku* (place to store books). I will begin by presenting short profiles of two reading gardens that are both well known and considered as models.

One of the first "new Taman Bacaan" founded was *tobucil*, short for *toko buku kecil* (small bookstore), a book store that used its income to fund a free Taman Bacaan. More than just giving access to books, they wanted a meeting place for activities, and engaging with the community (Wulandari, 2003). The store launched a variety of activities to support reading, such as a Sunday afternoon reading club, story telling for children, a writing class and a film club. During story telling, the *tobucil* volunteers try to enliven books for children with music and instruments, and sometimes bring animals or even a band to accompany the session (ibid.). Tobucil has now opened independent branches in Bali and Balikpapan as well (Febriane, 2004).

Another reading garden is Rumah Dunia, which author Gola Gong opened with the proceeds from one of his novels. Located in his large garden, it's motto is "*My home is the House of the World, I*



*build it with Words*" [Rumahku Rumah Dunia, Kubangun Dengan Kata-kata], and it features a packed program seven days a week (Gong, 2006). It begins with storytelling on Mondays. Outdoor drawing classes (called tours to appeal to children) on Tuesdays is one of the most popular activities, attracting about 50-60 children each time. Wednesdays and Thursdays are for composing stories or poems about parents, home, school or other things that interest the children (Children's library abuzz with activity, 2006).

Currently, over 400 children, including a number of street children, come almost every day from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. after school to participate in these activities (Hadi, 2004). On Fridays, the children and visitors explore the theatre on the 7x5 meter stage, and on Saturdays they are invited to express themselves through words or dance. Sunday, students are the focus of writing workshops that teach journalistic writing, fiction writing and writing for television - and this is the activity that has produced several published authors (Children's library abuzz with activity, 2006; Minat Baca Kurang?, 2003).

Finally, a wonderful example of making the reading garden responsive to local needs, and readers' own interests, was given at a discussion on building reading gardens that 1001 Buku arranged during the *Pameran Buku Jakarta* (Jakarta Book Exhibition) June 23, 2004, where Lutfi Kurnia from a reading garden in Bogor described his experiences. Working in the village Tegal Gundil, Lutfi discovered that the youth only "*hang out, get drunk, and flirt with passing girls*" [nongkrong, mabuk, dan menggoda perempuan yang lewat], and to get their interest he invited them to make a village newspaper with him about the topics that interested them. This excited them, and after a while they asked for access to books. Books were not enough in themselves though, because they are just "*benda mati*" (dead matter).

When the boys were reading about pollution in rivers, they could not understand, so Lutfi invited them to the river, and had his parents describe how the river had been 20 years ago, when it was five meters deep. Now, it was only two meters deep because of all the garbage clogging up the channel, and in this way the youth really understood not just about rivers, but also about pollution and the idea of creating a healthy environment. Another time he invited them to lay in the field and observe the sky, and imagine what the clouds could look like. He asked them where the clouds come from, and "*when the children also got curious about where the clouds came from, that's when I opened to about clouds. After that, they started getting interested in books.*" [Ketika anak-anak juga penasaran dari mana asalnya awan, barulah saya buka buku tentang terjadinya awan. Di sana mereka mulai tertarik pada buku.] (reported in Membuat reading garden yang Mengasyikkan, 2004).

What is listed above is clearly "best cases", however from the many newspaper articles, mailing list entries, and reports I have read, and from personal communication and experience, most independent reading gardens strive to run many activities, and make the reading garden an attractive and exciting place to be for children and adolescents. Reading gardens cannot compete with libraries in terms of number of books (the reading gardens surveyed had an average of 300 books each, with the maximum being 1000 and the minimum 150), but they are located conveniently, feel welcoming, and run many activities that engage visitors.

## Government Policy

Having surveyed the independent reading gardens, I will now review the official government policy, and the statistics that they have collected. In 2005, the government once again decided to get involved with community reading gardens. They observed that there was much enthusiasm around autonomous reading gardens, but believed that "*community reading gardens are still not successful in carrying out their function as places to increase reading interest and reading culture in the community, especially for new literates, because of several factors. The causes are amongst others: the managers of reading gardens are not creative enough, they are not skilled enough, not dedicated enough, with the result that the community's desire to read, and to utilize the reading garden is still not strong enough*" [TBM belum berhasil menjalankan fungsinya sebagai tempat meningkatkan minat baca dan budaya baca masyarakat khususnya aksarawan baru dikarenakan berbagai faktor. Faktor penyebab antara lain:

pengelola community reading garden kurang kreatif, kurang terampil, kurang berdedikasi, sehingga keinginan masyarakat untuk membaca dan memanfaatkan community reading garden belum penuh.] (Sujana, 2003, cited in Direktori TBM Tahun 2007, 2007, p. 7).

This is not consistent with what I have learnt about autonomous reading gardens, and I believe that what is referred to here is the “remains” of the community reading gardens that were set up in the 1990's. The community reading gardens funded by the government are as a group very different from the autonomous reading gardens I have come across in my research.

To help the community reading gardens reach their goals of increasing the reading interest of new literates, people who study in non-formal educational settings, and the general public, the program Development of Reading Culture and Building of Libraries [Pengembangan Budaya Baca dan Pembinaan Perpustakaan] was set up as part of the Strategic plan for Department of Education [Rencana Strategi Depdiknas 2005-2009], 2005-2009, which in 2006 became part of the Subdepartment for Increasing Reading Culture [Subdirektorat Peningkatan Budaya Baca] under the Department of Popular Education [Direktorat Pendidikan Masyarakat ] (Direktori TBM Tahun 2007, 2007). At the time, there was no official data on the existence of community reading gardens, and one of the sub department's activities in supporting community reading gardens was to organize a directory of community reading gardens, to make the existence and services of community reading gardens known nationally.

To a certain extent, the focus of community reading gardens has changed, from focusing mainly on new literates and simple literacy, to promoting interest in reading and reading culture in general, to help turn Indonesia into a learning society (ibid.). The Program for Developing a Reading Culture [Program Pengembangan Budaya Baca wants to expand community reading gardens to increase people's interest in reading, support libraries and provide quality and relevant books relevant to the needs of the people, and in turn also support the book industry. They listed the following elements as their focus:

**Activities:**

- Campaigning and promoting reading culture through mass media and other ways to increase reading culture in general in schools, other educational institutions and for the general public
- The expansion and the increase of quality of community reading gardens and libraries both from the collection standpoint, as well as other infrastructure
- Supporting the creation of people's libraries using the facilities that already exist in the community
- Increasing the role of citizens, including NGOs and the business world, so that reading facilities are available that support life-long learning
- Educating and training library and community reading garden staff
- Increasing the diverse functions of community reading gardens so that community reading gardens are interesting both to children and youth as well as to parents for them to learn and develop their creativity
- Empowering the community reading garden staff to turn the community reading garden into a center for learning resources

**Relevant policy:**

- Creating community reading gardens for new literates is a priority in provinces with high illiteracy rates
- Supplying infrastructure and reading materials to community reading gardens that already exist
- Supplying community reading gardens to special communities in urban areas using ICT
- Creating manual(s) for “The Movement for a People that is Interested in Reading”, and spreading it in all of Indonesia step-by-step
- Evaluating the effect of the increase in reading culture and the efficacy of community reading garden (From Direktori TBM Tahun 2007, 2007, p. 8-9, author's translation)



In addition to supplying block grants to community reading gardens (see below), the activities of the Sub department for Increasing Reading Culture in 2005-2006 also included publishing information material, like the booklet *“Manual on running a community reading garden”* [Panduan Penyelenggaraan TBM] , leaflets with profiles on community reading gardens and about the program Development of Reading Culture. In a newspaper article, the Director General of Non-Formal Education Ace Suryadi stated that the budget for these activities increased from 8,5 billion rupiah in 2005 to 40 billion rupiah in 2006, and 90 billion rupiah in 2007. 60% of this is a block grant that goes to local government through provincial governments, based on proposals. He added that the department will gradually increase the budget to promote reading culture and informal education (Dari TB ke Kios Buku, 2007).

## Government Programs 2000-2008

As stated above, there has traditionally been very little data available about the governments community reading garden programs, and even less about the autonomous reading gardens. The Department of Education's Directory of community reading gardens underlines that “ *To decide on a policy, the availability of data is very important, and because of this, data need to be archived, made available, printed, copied and distributed to all competent parties.*” [Untuk menentukan sebuah kebijakan, keberadaan data adalah sangat penting, oleh karena itu perlu semua data diarsipkan, disajikan, dicetak, digandakan dan didistribusikan kepada berbagai pihak yang berkompeten.] (Direktori TBM Tahun 2007, 2007, p.3). They further state that because of little attention from provincial and regional governments, who do not collect data about the existence of reading gardens/community reading gardens, service hours, etc., the only data available is for the community reading gardens that applied for block grants (*ibid.*).

The block grants were distributed as follows: In 2005, a total of 1,079 community reading gardens were supported, and 1,014 community reading gardens received 4 million rupiah, 30 community reading gardens received 10 million rupiah, 25 community reading gardens received 20 million rupiah, and 10 community reading gardens received 50 million rupiah. In 2006, a total of 478 community reading gardens were supported, and 383 community reading gardens received 10 million rupiah, 70 community reading gardens received 25 million rupiah, and 25 community reading gardens received 50 million rupiah. In addition to these numbers, an extra 367 community reading gardens were given 10 million rupiah each at the end of 2006 (all numbers from Direktori TBM Tahun 2007, 2007, p. 9-10). If one adds up the numbers of community reading gardens that have received support during these two years, and assume that each is only eligible for support once, the total number of community reading gardens would be 1903, however data has only been collected for 1029 community reading gardens, and the Department of Education itself thus raises the question of whether the remaining ones exist on the paper only (*ibid.*). In a newspaper article, Direktor General of the Non-Formal and Informal Education Department stated that “*there are at least 6,000 reading garden in the National Department of Education's network,*” [Setidaknya, terdapat sekitar 6.000 TB yang berjejaringan dengan Departemen Pendidikan Nasional] but this number must include autonomous libraries, and is not mentioned anywhere in the Direktori reading garden 2007 (2007) (Dari TB ke Kios Buku, 2007).

As for the community reading gardens that the government provides statistics about, they seem to display characteristics that are very different from the typical autonomous reading gardens that I have come across in my research. The Direktori TBM 2007 states that 82% are run out of Community Centers for Learning Activities [Pusat Kegiatan Belajar Masyarakat], and 93% of them do not have full-time staff, but are run by mostly teachers or headmasters. A striking 100%, according to the Directory, do not have any activities except lending out books; i.e., no reading circles, writing workshops or anything else that has become the trademark for autonomous reading gardens. Only about 10% are open every day, although for some reason the data for “two days and below” has been lumped together with “no answer” (a total of 74%) which makes the numbers very unclear. This data is however supported by Muslih (2003), who writes that many school libraries are often only open for about 15 minutes during breaks, and that most school libraries have no or very few designated opening hours. This is in strong contrast to the

survey conducted with independent reading gardens that are part of 1001 Buku's network - there, all but two said that they were open every day of the week.

Regarding the history of operation, the largest percentage (22%) were reported as having been started in 2006, with only 6% started in 2000 or earlier (Direktori TBM 2007, 2007, bab iii). Note that there was no independent verification of any of this data, and it is purely based on self-reporting, which could be skewed, since the purpose was to obtain a grant. In addition to the community reading gardens that are listed above, there were 127 mobile community reading gardens in operation in 2007 (Bella, 2007). The survey provides no data on number of trainings provided, but the Government of Jawa Timur provides an account of one training that was conducted over three days for the supervisors of 85 different community reading gardens from different cities that had been awarded block grants (Peningkatan Kecerdasan, 2006).

### Future Government Plans

For the year 2008, the funding priorities have been divided into four sectors. *"Social pioneer funding"* [dana sosial rintisan is given to government agencies or NGOs that wish to start new community reading gardens. The support, which can only be given once to each project, is fixed at 15 million rupiah, of which at least 40% has to be spent on books and other reading material, and maximum 20% each for administration, events and furniture/tools (Pedoman Penyaluran Bantuan, 2008). community reading gardens that already exist can apply for *"Social help to strengthen community reading gardens"* [bantuan sosial penguatan TBM], fixed at 25 million dollars, with the same distribution criteria as above. *Centers for Learning Activities* [Sanggar Kegiatan Belajar] set up by the provincial government, which have received a mobile community reading garden, can also receive 40 million rupiah for buying books and reading material (*ibid.*). These book mobiles work much like circulating libraries [perpustakaan keliling] in that they offer direct lending services to individuals in hard-to-reach sites, but they also assist in circulating books between community reading gardens, to provide more variety for the users (TBM Mobil, 2007). The final category offers 125 million rupiah to government agencies or NGOs that want to hold events related to promoting reading culture (Pedoman Penyaluran Bantuan, 2008).

In the future, the government is planning to set up reading gardens in every sub district and every village (counting about 10,000 villages in Indonesia), in addition to providing mobile community reading gardens, and urban community reading gardens based on information and communication technology (Bella, 2007; 5.500 TBM Terbengkalai, 2006). In a newspaper article, Ace Suryadi, Director General of Non-Formal and Informal Education, stated that the department will gradually increase the budget to promote reading culture and informal education. The budget increased from 8,5 billion rupiah in 2005 to 40 billion rupiah in 2006, and 90 billion rupiah in 2007, with 60% being a block grant going to local government through provincial governments, based on proposals (Dari TB ke Kios Buku, 2007). The Department of Education has also announced that they want the community reading gardens to expand from not only lending out books, but also opening cheap bookstores (*kios buku murah*), which they hope will make the community reading gardens more attractive to visitors, and the community more interested in visiting (*ibid.*).

In addition, a new program was launched in 2007 by the Minister of Religion M. Maftuh Basyuni and the Minister of Education Bambang Sudibyo to promote formal and non-formal education, including reading gardens, in places of religious worship. Sudibyo contrasted the condition of places of religious worship with those of schools. *"Wherever there are places of religious worship, they are in good condition, because they are so loved by the community. Because of that, we hope that extending formal education and reading garden to these places will be effective,"* [Di mana-mana tempat ibadah itu kondisinya baik karena begitu dicintai keberadaannya oleh masyarakat. Karena itu, memperluas pendidikan formal dan TB di tempat-tempat tersebut diharapkan efektif] whereas schools are falling apart. *"It seems that these school buildings are only loved by the government"* [Rupanya gedung-gedung sekolah itu hanya dicintai oleh pemerintah] (Pendidikan di Tempat Ibadah, 2006). Combining reading gardens and mosques is also a natural fit, as Sudibyo states that mosques have been centers of culture

and places of education throughout history (ibid.). The program starts slowly, with fourteen places of religious worship, including mosques, churches, Buddhist and Hindu temples, receiving 25 million rupiah each to set up reading gardens. The department is planning to expand this budget aggressively next year (Rumah Ibadah Jadi Tempat Pendidikan Luar Sekolah, 2007).

In fact, there has already been a growth in literacy and library movements among the Islamic community in Indonesia. Libraries were built in mosques and religious schools, and a number of different groups promoted the construction of reading gardens. The artist Yessy Gusman is well known for her work in spreading Children's Reading Gardens, having started over 40 in different cities, and she has worked together with the *Badan Amil Zakat Nasional* (The National Body of Amil Zakat. Zakat is obligatory payment made annually under Islamic law and used for charitable and religious purposes. ["zakat, n", OED Online, 2008]), which collect tithes that Muslims are obliged to pay (Baznas Gagasan Taman Bacaan Az Zahra, 2004). There are also religious programs to collect books directly, known as *wakaf books*. ("Initially, the concept of 'wakaf' defined as acres of land belongs to one and or a group of people which is donated for public interest, as mosque and market. Later on, the concept of 'wakaf' has a broader definition; 'wakaf' could be in a form of personal property instead of the donated land for the public welfare." [Ali, 2006]).

### **Just a Fancy Name for "Library"?**

The well known Indonesian library researcher Putu Laxman Pendit is highly sceptical to the idea of reading gardens as a new and positive development, and one of the things he criticizes is their choice of name - or rather, that they seek to distinguish themselves from libraries.

"So why is it then, that the NGOs and defenders of ordinary people that now appear like mushrooms during rainy season also so commonly use the word "reading garden" in their proposals, as long as there is already word that fits, isn't difficult, has only one meaning, and is based on clear principles: Library." [Lalu mengapa LSM dan para pembela rakyat kecil yang sekarang bermunculan seperti jamur di musim hujan itu juga gemar menggunakan kata 'Taman Bacaan' di dalam proposal-proposal mereka, pada saat sudah ada kata yang pas, tidak njelimet, bermakna-tunggal, dan berdasarkan prinsip-prinsip yang jelas: P E R P U S T A K A A N.] (Pendit, 2008)

To understand how reading gardens relate to libraries, and the differences between libraries and reading gardens, I will provide three perspectives. I will first discuss the social function of reading gardens, including the idea of reading interest. I will then look at the naming of reading gardens, using survey data from Jakarta. Finally, I will discuss the relationship between reading gardens and libraries today.

### **Social Function of Reading Gardens**

Public libraries in Indonesia today are still underdeveloped. In 2003, there were 26 provincial libraries, 452 public libraries in cities, sub districts and villages, and 346 libraries in places of worship. There were 12,618 school libraries, but there is reason to believe that many of these consist of a shelf in a mostly locked room (Perpustakaan Nasional, 2003). These are extremely low numbers for a large country with a population of almost 240 million people. Apart from the numbers themselves, the quality and services offered are not sufficient. Finally, large groups in the population do not see the public library as an attractive or available resource. The main branch of the public library in Jakarta [Perpustakaan Umum Daerah Jakarta] is located on the 7th floor of a government building. Getting a library card requires identification, a fee, sometimes a letter from your work unit or neighborhood unit (RT/RW), and takes two weeks.

Given this, will reading gardens ever be a good alternative or a replacement for public libraries? Are they a radical alternative to empower Indonesia's poor? The first community reading gardens started

by the government in the 1990's were focused on new literates in villages, and were almost an extension of the literacy programs run by the government. However, from the reading gardens that I have presented, we see that the focus is overwhelmingly on children. In both cases, the focus is on stimulating a love of reading, and in the latter case, also of creativity and expression. The focus is on *mencerdaskan bangsa* (making the nation smart) and developing a *budaya baca* (reading culture) or *gemar membaca* (reading interest). This is reflected both in the naming of government programs, as well as in the writings of reading garden activists, and was frequently mentioned in interviews with me.

There are several aspects to this. Pendit (2006) questions the pressure to convert Indonesia from an "oral" to a "written" society, stating that we need both. I also question whether there really is a lack of reading interest in Indonesia, or whether it is simply a question of lack of access to affordable and interesting reading material. A normal pocket novel in Indonesia currently costs between 15,000 and 30,000 rupiah. 30,000 rupiah is 12 times the price of a bus ticket in Jakarta, or 6 times the price of a dinner at a streetside cafe, and a significant part of the income of someone who makes 500,000 rupiah per month.

Interestingly, despite the fact that some of the reading gardens were started by political activists and people in the punk movement in Bandung, politics and education for democracy very seldom came up in the interviews or written sources. In many Western countries, libraries and equitable access to information is seen as a prerequisite for democracy and citizenship (see for example Laaksovirta, 2003). In Indonesia, this aspect is curiously absent or very poorly represented. At Rumah Dunia, the children do learn about critical journalism, but this again seems to be part of an agenda to *mencerdaskan Bandung* (make Bandung smarter).

By couching their missions in terms of children, imagination, love of learning, knowledge society and reading, the significantly different actors - political activists, mosques and government agencies, to choose three - are able to concentrate on a common goal. In that sense, these people's libraries seem very different from libraries set up by labor unions in other countries, or the Freirean ideal of teaching literacy through topics that are directly related to people's own oppression (Freire, 1970). Putu Laxman Pendit criticizes the idea that the intellectual and privileged class knows what the poor want to read, and that for example telling fairy tales to poor people is to hide the truth from them. "*reading gardens directly join in biasing the oppressed people through telling stories that hide the truth about the inequity in information, and the domination by elite groups of the systems of communication.*" [reading garden secara langsung ikut membius rakyat jelata melalui dongeng yang menyembunyikan kenyataan tentang ketimpangan informasi dan dominasi kaum elit pada sistem komunikasi.] (Pendit, 2008).

Tarlen Handayani, one of the pioneers in the *komunitas literer* movement is also aware of the middle-class bias: "*In Bandung, for example, book stores and literary communities are initiated by groups with higher education which makes it part of realizing themselves.*" [Di Bandung, misalnya, toko buku dan komunitas literasi ini diinisiasi oleh kelompok pendidikan tinggi yang menjadikan itu sebagai bagian dari aktualisasi diri.] (Handayani, 2007). She calls for the reading gardens to not stop at just giving access to books: "*So that the literacy movements don't just keep inviting people to read, but move to become a movement for social consciousness-raising, increasing the quality of life in society*" [Sehingga gerakan literasi tidak berhenti melulu pada sebuah ajakan membaca, namun bergerak menjadi semacam gerakan penyadaran sosial untuk, katakanlah, meningkatkan kualitas hidup masyarakatnya.] (Ibid.).

## Naming of Gardens

Since the question about naming reading gardens as being something distinct from libraries has come up, I wanted to get an overview over the names chosen by independent reading gardens. It is common for reading gardens to avoid using the word *library*, because they are seen as boring and intimidating. Many simply call themselves *reading garden* so-and-so - KKS Melati, an organization with several reading gardens, explained that they wanted to avoid the idea of a place just to read books, and that reading garden sounds like a more dynamic place to play and have learning activities for children

(VGR, cited in Septiana, 2007, p. 67). However, there are also a number of other variants - for example Wijaya (2005) noted that they had called their reading garden “*planet baca*” (reading planet) to make it seem more exciting to children. To get an overview, I combined the database of reading gardens in the greater Jakarta area, which I received from 1001 Buku, with the list of reading gardens in Indonesia (probably not up-to-date) from their website.

After removing duplicates, I was left with 153 names. 25 were called Taman Baca or reading garden, four were reading garden Anak (Reading Garden for Children), 11 Rumah Baca (Reading House), 4 Rumah Belajar (Learning House), 12 more that started with Rumah (including Rumah Singgah for street children, Rumah Pelangi invoking the rainbow and Rumah Ekspresi focusing on creative expression). Perhaps surprisingly, 38 were called Perpustakaan (library), but from the names it would appear that most of these are in mosques, churches or Hindu or Buddhist temples, for example “*The Public Islamic Library of Mosque Baiturrahman*” [Perpustakaan Islam Umum Masjid Baiturrahman] or “*The Library of the Tempel of Wonomulyo*” [Perpustakaan Vihara Wonomulyo.] Perpustakaan Umum “Rumah Baca Milik Kita” (The Public Library - “The Reading House Belonging to Us”) is an interesting example of combining the common title of tax-funded public libraries, with the idea of a reading garden that belongs to, and is run by, the local community.

### Working Relationships

Asked about how the Department of Education sees the difference between libraries and community reading gardens, given that they fund both categories, the head of the sub-section for Reading Culture Ridwan Arshad answered that the difference was not very important, since they fulfill the same function. He noted that community reading gardens are more common in rural areas, and poor urban areas, and that the process to become a member was not too formal (personal communication, 2008). Some librarians are very supportive of reading gardens, such as Ida Fajar Priyanto, head of the university library the Universitas Gajah Mada, who has conducted research on reading gardens in Yogyakarta (Priyanto, 2006).

An interesting part is the relationship between librarians in public libraries and in reading gardens. Priyanto has noted that part of the reason for the growth of reading gardens in Yogyakarta is the number of graduates from library studies, who cannot find a job in a public library (Personal communication, 2006). However, as Merdikaningtyas (2007) has pointed out, these librarians then feel isolated from professional development since they are not able to join the union of Indonesian librarians. Finally, professional librarians in Indonesia are already suffering from “low self-esteem”, and from mailing lists it appears that some feel that reading gardens exaggerate this feeling, by making it seem that anyone can do the job of a librarian (see Sudarsono, 1998).

### Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to offer a survey of the current situation of reading gardens in Indonesia. Although there are examples of informal or community libraries in other countries, see for example the reading tents and donkey libraries in Zimbabwe (Nilsson 2002; Mpofu and Carlsson 1995), the rural libraries in Uganda (Dent 2006; Stranger- Johannessen 2009) or indigenous libraries in Latin America (Civallero 2007), I believe the Indonesian case is unique both qualitatively and quantitatively. By studying government statistics and comparing them with a survey of independent reading gardens connected to the 1001 Buku network, I have been able to show that the profile of these two groups are very different.

I have offered a number of examples of how independent reading gardens operate, to give the reader a feel for the role that they play. There is still much research to be done, and it is hoped that the government continues its efforts to support reading gardens - but widens its support to include truly independent reading gardens - as well as continues to improve its own statistics. A much more detailed



survey that included factors leading to the success or failure of independent reading gardens would also be very valuable, since there is indications that the average life of a new reading garden is not very long.

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